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Become an Innovator. Make Change in Healthcare.

## HOW TO BE MORE INNOVATIVE

You are listening to ReachMD XM 157, the channel for medical professional.

Dr. John Kao describes himself as having had 6 careers. The most recent one is innovator. His new book has been called by reviewer, Bruce Nussbaum, scary, insightful and ultimately very useful. Welcome to the clinician roundtable. I am Dr. Leslie Lundt, your host and with me today is Dr. John Kao. Dr. Kao has held faculty position at Harvard Business School, MIT Media Lab, Yale College, and United States Naval Postgraduate School. Dubbed "Mr. Creativity" and "a serial innovator" by The Economist. Dr. Kao describes his job description as "instigator of new things." His latest book is called "Innovation Nation."

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

Welcome to ReachMD, John.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Thank, good to be here.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

You had one of most interesting career paths I had ever seen. Tell me about your 6 careers.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Well, first of all, it might be dignifying to call it a career path, if you know, more or like a series of improvisations. I think it goes back to an experience I had when I was about 10 and just put in a nutshell, I found a science fiction book in my parents' house that described a new discipline that was at the interface between behavioral science and politics, military strategy, and engineering and a few other kind of disciplines thrown in what is called naxalism and it somehow enable people to make change happen in society and I said to myself at the age of 10, when you sort of know everything, I guess, I am going to do that when I grow up, and then I found out that it did not exist

as a profession.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

Naxiologist?

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Naxalist.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

Oh! Naxalist.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

So, you know, at the naxessive thing, so you know, let me see if I can get this right, career goal #1 was professional music, career goal #2 was <\_\_\_\_> cycle analyst, and I guess career goal #2 part B was professor of psychiatry at some well known medical school, because I did go to Yale Medical School, I did a residency in psychiatry at the McLane Division of Massachusetts General and you know all of these things did happen. Career goal #3 was Harvard Business School professor which I did for 14 years. Career goal #5 was Hollywood producer. I produced a couple of feature films, 3 Broadway plays and way back when I had a stint of keyboard player with Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention and career goal #6 is now, I guess, you could describe me or the New York Times described me as an evangelist for a national innovation agenda, so the book "Innovation Nation," the subtitle says it all is really, you know, how America has lost its innovation edge, why it matters, and what we can do to get it back and so I had been taking all of my knowledge of behavioral science, business, international studies, production value, narrative, facilitation, and using them every day in work with clients who ranged from national governments to municipalities, regions around the world who are trying to take this journey of innovation. That is my current obsession and I guess it is correct to say as career #6.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

Many of our listeners and fellow physicians are incredibly burnt out by the daily work of being a doctor and increasingly fighting bureaucracies that aren't innovative, at least in our eyes, what advice do you have for us?

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Well, I think you have one life to live, so you have to kind of follow your passions and follow it bliss and I think that is why many of us got into medicine in the first place. I have seen a number of different patterns. Some people burn out and leave. They seek complimentary or alternative career paths and others manage to make some kind of an accommodation, so one of my classmates from medical school went back and got a law degree and is a black belt in Taekwondo and you know has many outside interests, so that there is a balance. So, then, you know, obviously some people kind of stick to the living. I think, just general speaking, being in a human service type business, makes you vulnerable to burn out, so you have to, in the immediate term, be thinking about work life balance, but in the long term also, try to figure out what the motives were for getting into medicine in the first place, which in my experience, typically quite

idealistic and kind of make the world a better place kind of motives and then figure out how those motivations can get expressed if it is not through the billable units, factory of clinical medicine, then feel free to make a change, either in terms of the proportion of time you spend doing things or the distribution of that activities, because, you know, I feel the medicine doesn't want burnt out physicians.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

Hmm, hmm, and certainly the patients don't.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Right.

**If you are just joining our discussion, you are listening to ReachMD XM 157, the channel for medical professionals. I am Dr. Leslie Lundt, your host and with me today is Dr. John Kao. We are discussing perhaps how to be more innovative.**

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

So, John, there is the question. Let's talk about physicians and what we do and clinical practice kinds of settings, especially how can we be more innovative.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

First of all, I want to say that there is a lot of confusion around what innovation is. Innovation is not the same thing as creativity. So, creativity is the ability, we all have to come up with new ideas, new insights, but those insights may or may not be valuable. Innovation is about creativity that is applied to some purpose and that generates some real some measurable value, all right! So, you know, I think it is important to keep those things separate. A lot of people think of innovation is that letting your hair down, brain storming cool ideas stuff, and that is not exactly accurate. The other point to make about innovation is that it operates at different level. So, there is the innovation of an individual for instance, you know, like Steve Jobs is an innovative guy, lets say. There is innovation at the level of a hot team. So, you know, the Apple Macintosh development team is a hot team. There is innovation at the level of an enterprise, so Apple Computer, a global company is innovative and then there is innovation at the societal level, so, Silicon Valley which is part of the US is an innovative place within which Apple Computer has its headquarters. So, you know, when you answer question, what can a physician do about innovation, I think that it's a good idea to keep those different levels in mind. There is a lot that one can do to address ones own creativity in terms of coming up with new valuable ideas and in fact a lot of physicians do have, for better or for the worse, because he doesn't know it will work out well, because they have sort of latent entrepreneurial tendencies and, you know, whether its commercializing some medical product or thinking about a new kind of health service or setting up an independent kind of health service business, there are lot of opportunities at an individual level to think up something new and push it forward. I think there is also an influence that one have in ones professional relationship, so whether its with colleagues or your clinical team or you clinic or your hospital, trying to figure out how a hot team could be mobilized to pursue some objective, is an other level of doing it and then I think, you know, there is the opportunity to think about how it works at an enterprise level, so that you know, the field of healthcare, the field of healthcare, you know, on a global basis and I think each one of those is set of lenses for looking out how you find an answer of the question of what I can do. I mean, some physicians are getting involved in health policy or they are getting involved in transforming the healthcare system through electronic medical records and the digitalization at healthcare and, you know, some are content to sit in their practice and come up occasionally with some better way or better mouth strap, those are all perfectly valid ways of approaching the

question of, you know, how to innovate.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

Thinking probably our listeners are in their car, driving frantically from clinic to clinic or hospital to hospital thinking, well, yeah, you know, I can have this what I think is a great idea, but how do I get started, what is the first step, how can they get some inertia moving in a positive direction here?

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Well, it's different for everybody. I don't think, it's like saying, you know, how do you make you are thinking better. I think people have different kind of ways of managing themselves to make their thought process better, so but I would say the following, I would say that things that don't get focussed on don't happen, so sometimes I will counsel people to start jotting their ideas about a new business down in a notebook or I will, you know, suggest that they do what in the corporate world is quite common which is to write a one-page memo of what the idea is and how its going to be realized, because, you know, we can't do that, if you don't have anything. You know, ultimately, one has to, if you introduce something new, you got to write a business plan and business plans, there are plenty of books and resources online for how to write business plans, that is another discipline for kind of shaping the idea. I think talking to other people about the idea. If you haven't done something entrepreneurial before trying to find a partner who may rammed out your flat side, may not even be in medicine, but may have business skills or what not, could be a good way to go, but I think, you know, that the most important thing is to make room in your life. Doctors tend to be busy in, you know, they tend to be working at 110% of capacity, so if you don't have wide space, new things aren't going to happen.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

It is funny, John, as you are speaking, I thought immediately of Dr. David Preskill who happens to be the founder of this channel, ReachMD, and he is a busy OB/GYN who was literally driving between hospitals thinking, you know, it shouldn't be nice to have the dead time in my car be used to actually learn something and out of those commutes, ReachMD was born, so it really can happen.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Well, and also, I think another aspect of what you are saying is that the new idea often comes from your immediate environment. In other words, if you have notice something that is missing or you have an idea about something that would be a better mouth strap, your own experience is a rich source of input. You shouldn't just think, well, I have got to go out and think really hard about what the world needs from the abstract, you are surrounded; we are all surrounded by interesting opportunities.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

Now, John, you have been able to leverage your training as a psychiatrist into rather successful and there I say innovative business career, do you have any advice to our listeners who may be sitting there thinking, you know, I just < \_\_\_\_ > this whole doctor thing and try something new? You did it.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Everybody's story is different, though I wouldn't say that I am an object lesson for anybody. I knew, way at the beginning that I wanted to get train clinical psychiatry because it would be valuable for other things I wanted to do and I thought that I would potentially become an academic medicine type, but that stopped being interesting after a while and I had an opportunity to go to business school and doors opened up and the rest is history, I guess. So, everybody has got to figure it out for themselves, I mean, if you don't like doing clinical medicine and you have some money saved up and you have some plausible ideas about other things to do, there is nothing stopping you from either taking a sabbatical and trying something new or just making a change. People do it all the time. I happened to have done it at early career because, you know, my PGY 4 year was my MBA 1 year and that was kind of the transition point for me. I have got friends who I went to business school with who went to Harvard Medical School and never did a house officer stint, he just went right to business school and then became a medical venture capitalist. So, you know, doctors are smart and they are enterprising and they are hardworking and I would say, so here is the nugget for you, I would say that whatever entrepreneurial success I have had has been very much based on my training in medicine and the reason I say that is because once you have done an internship and you have done medical school, nobody can tell you about working hard or pursuing a goal is in a relentless way or making things happen, because, you know, you want to have make things happen for you patients and, you know, you want to achieve objectives, so I think medicine is actually a great crucible for developing entrepreneurial skills, but the problem is that, you know, the training in medicine is not really relevant for being an entrepreneur, so you know, you might consider doing an executive MBA course or small business owner's course or, you know, starting to read or what not if you wanted to move in the business direction. A lot of doctors get killed because they think they know so much that they know about entrepreneurial things too. You need to round out your flat sides wherever possible, but there is nothing written in stone to stick with one career for your entire life.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

We have been speaking with Dr. John Kao, the author of the Innovation Nation. Thanks so much John.

**DR. JOHN KAO:**

Thank you.

**DR. LESLIE LUNDT:**

I am Dr. Leslie Lundt. You have been listening to the clinician's roundtable on ReachMD XM 157, the channel for medical professionals. To listen to our on-demand library, visit us at [www.reachmd.com](http://www.reachmd.com). If you have comments or suggestions or questions, give us a ring at 888 MD XM 157. Thank you for listening.